



THE GHOSTS OF MARTHA RUDD

by

Dennis Diamond & Pat Blossie

Extract

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THE GHOSTS OF MARTHA RUDD

a play in two acts

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Running time: Approximately 2 hours (including a 20 minute interval)

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CAST in order of appearance

EMILY DUNNE (41), Land Girl, Manchester born, assigned to take the place of Frank and Lucian Rudd, sons of the farm owners, who have been called-up to fight in WWII.

JOE RUDD (61), Farm owner, speaks broad Devonian and fairly unintelligible, brow-beaten by his wife.

MARTHA RUDD (61) Farmer's wife, a harridan, hard-working, short-tempered and unpopular.

BETTY PASSMORE (mid 20s), Land Girl but city girl at heart, from Plymouth, thinks herself to be superior to and better educated than the 'country bumpkins' around her, not accustomed to being spoken to harshly, very opinionated and workshy.

CONNIE GREENSLADE (18-19), Land Girl, used to the country life having been brought up with horses near Tiverton, does most of Betty's work, excitable but shy and not very talkative, very naïve and unworldly.

NICK CLATWORTHY (65) Martha's cousin, the local black marketeer, poacher, postman, firewatcher, odd-job man and vicar, a man taking advantage of every situation wartime presents to him, especially when women are involved, his motives sometimes seem suspicious.

MINNIE CLATWORTHY (66) Martha's sister, blousy, flamboyant, unmarried, a self-proclaimed psychic medium, always trying to get one-up on her sister.

ENYD CLATWORTHY (mid 20s) An orphan, found wandering on Exmoor as a young girl, taken in and unofficially adopted by Minnie Clatworthy, known locally as 'the child of the moor', has genuine psychic powers which Minnie refuses to acknowledge, sometimes distant and remote, the only person who can 'feel', see and hear the ghosts, or is she?!

ROGER BLAKEMORE (50ish) a large, red-faced farmer with a strong Devon accent,

The Ghosts:

WILLIAM RUDD (about 80), grandfather to Joe and Albert, died in 1906.

ALBERT RUDD (late 20s), Joe's older brother, died in 1906.

[Note: The ghosts 'speak' through Enyd. William and Albert are non-speaking roles and their 'voices' rely upon the versatility of the actress playing Enyd. Joe Rudd also becomes a ghost. It would be difficult for an actress to imitate an actor whose voice is familiar to the audience, so his ghostly speeches are written for him to speak while Enyd mimes his words. You might decide to present this in another way, perhaps by allowing William and Albert to speak their own lines, by the use of recorded voices, or some other alternative. Imaginative solutions are welcomed.]

Guests at the wake: (These parts have few lines. In some cases, none)

MR AND MRS SMYTH (middle-aged) a country couple with city aspirations, neighbours of the Rudds.

The **MISS FITZ TWINS** (elderly) maiden aunts of Martha and Minnie, one is almost blind, the other almost deaf.

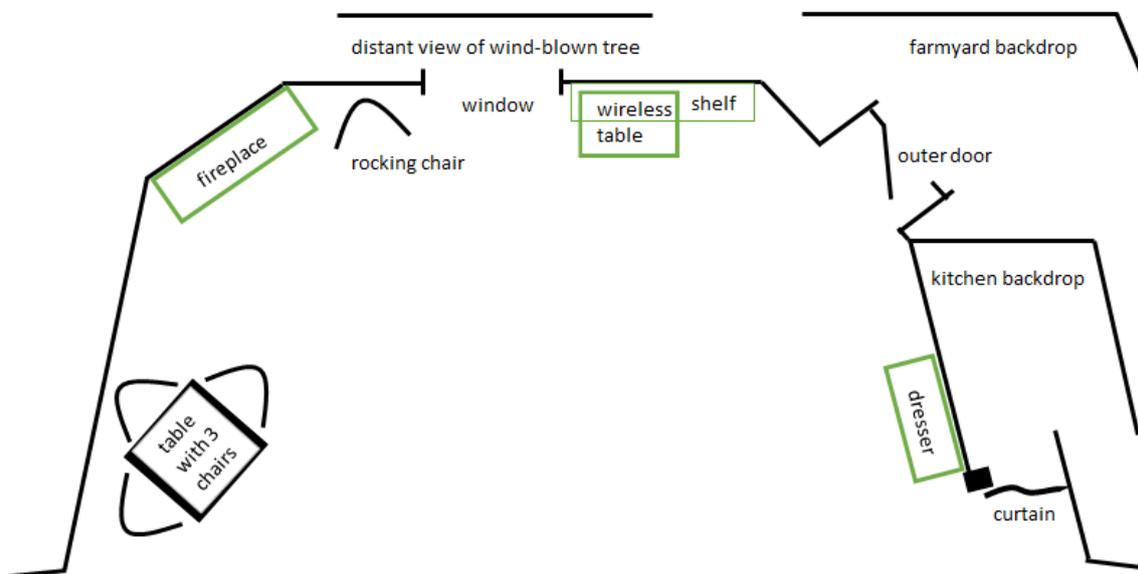
OLD MA HUXTABLE (very elderly) a stout, strong-willed country woman, second cousin to Joe Rudd.

SPINSTER DEWDROP (Mildred) (very elderly), a small, thin, frail, distant cousin of Joe Rudd.

Setting

The play is set in the living room of a farmhouse on the edge of Exmoor in the winter of 1941. The following description is suitable for a box set but, with a little ingenuity this could be adapted to a minimalist setting, perhaps using black backcloths and blacked-out stagehands to manipulate the ghostly apparatus.

Furnishings are sparse: a small, square table with a gingham tablecloth DR with three old, bentwood chairs, an upright, free-standing kitchen cupboard or Welsh dresser of the period L, containing a few chipped and unmatched cups and plates and a few tumblers, together with one or two ancient ornaments. A shotgun hangs on the wall R. A well-worn, wooden rocking chair sits in the corner UR beside a large fireplace. Two old, brass candlesticks stand at each end of a high mantelpiece. The only other furniture is a crystal wireless set that stands proudly on a small table UC. The walls were once painted in unappealing, dentist-waiting-room-green but are now faded and peeling. A few cheap prints and photographs break up the monotony of the walls, hanging by twine from a wooden picture rail that runs around the whole room. There is a large, laid but unlit, open fireplace taking up the corner UR. Above the wireless is a shelf containing about two dozen battered, old books. It appears to be slightly skew-whiff. Although utilitarian and sparse, the room is nonetheless clean and tidy. A large, heavy door in the UL corner leads off a small porch with a farmhouse courtyard and all other farm buildings beyond. A small window in the back wall URC gives a view of a hedge in the middle distance, out of which a leafless tree rises and bends at an improbable angle where it has grown in a constant battle against the wind. In the distance are rolling hills and a grey, clouded sky. An internal, curtained archway DL leads to a kitchenette and all other parts of the house.



THE GHOSTS OF MARTHA RUDD

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

December 1941, late afternoon

SOUND FX: *After the house lights have dimmed and before the curtain rises, we hear the sounds of Schoenberg's Verklarte Nacht Molto Rallentando.*

LIGHTING FX: *When the curtain rises, it is late afternoon/early evening on a bitterly cold and windy mid-December day. The room is poorly lit with just the dim light from outside pooling in the UR corner through the small window in the back wall and a glimmer from the valves in the wireless set.*

VISUAL FX: *The rocking chair shudders as if some unseen body had just sat in it.*

SOUND FX: *The classical music fades and a Music Hall ballad cuts in, A LITTLE BIT OF WHAT YOU FANCY DOES YOU GOOD*

VISUAL FX: *The chair starts to rock gently back and forth, roughly in time to the music.*

There is a muffled shout from outside. A woman's voice (EMILY) but the words are indistinct.

VISUAL FX: *The rocking chair starts to rock more vigorously.*

A few seconds later a man's voice is heard. It is JOE RUDD. All of Joe's speeches are slurred and guttural, in a very broad Devon accent. There are rarely more than one or two recognisable words in anything he says. Only his wife, Martha, understands what he says, and sometimes even she is baffled.

JOE: *(off, muffled)* Cor, oi dersent naw – 'tis yarking! *(Translation: I don't know, its bitter weather!)*

VISUAL FX: *The rocking chair rocks yet more vigorously*

SOUND FX: *the music reaches a climax as the door UL bursts open.*

VISUAL FX: *The rocking chair stops instantly.*

SOUND FX: *The Music Hall ballad stops and the Schoenberg fades back in as EMILY enters UL.*

SOUND FX: *The sound of the high wind when the door opens has a ghostly quality to it.*

EMILY *struggles against the wind to close the heavy door. She is dressed in a Land Girl's uniform with a pair of heavy, muddy boots and little more than a thin scarf and a pair of gloves two sizes too big for her to keep out the cold. These she removes straight away. She turns on the light and shivers.*

LIGHTING FX: *Lights up*

EMILY: Good grief, it's colder in here than it is outside. And what is that dreadful smell again? It smells like someone's died in here!
(wrapping the scarf back round her neck) And not so much as a paraffin stove to take the edge off your chilblains. (She moves to the wireless.) We'll get rid of that dirge for a start. (She twiddles a knob and the station changes to DON'T SIT UNDER THE APPLE TREE by the Andrews Sisters.) That's better. Oh, I like that. You can dance to that.

EMILY starts to dance, at the same time blowing into her hands to warm them up.

SOUND FX: strong wind as the door opens fading but still audible when it closes

JOE: (enters UL. He stands open mouthed at **EMILY**'s contortions.) Aargh, polshing purty.
(Translation: Moving in a superior fashion but pretty with it.)

EMILY: (still dancing) I think I've invented a new dance - the Shimmy, Shiver and Shake. Hurry up and close that door, Joe. It's cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey.

JOE: (muttering under his breath as he slowly pushes the door closed without taking his eyes off **EMILY**) Emily, 'e be dabster right 'nough. Do make oi soft to see thee. (Translation: 'Emily you be good at what you do)

EMILY puts out a hand for **JOE** to join him. He turns away shyly.

JOE: Not ol' Joe, 'e be knock-kneed (Translation: bow-legged)

SOUND FX: radio off

EMILY: (shrugs and turns the wireless off. She sits in one of the bentwood chairs and struggles unsuccessfully to remove one of her boots.) God, I hate these things!

She continues to struggle as **JOE** pulls up another chair and lifts one of his feet up onto it heavily. The boot is encrusted with mud. He starts to undo the laces.

EMILY: She'll tear you off a strip if she sees your muddy boot decorating her best chair.

JOE: 'Er nibs 'ollers a lot, uppity maid. Don't min' mizzel. (Translation: The boss does shout a lot, irritable woman. Don't mind myself)

EMILY: (not quite understanding him) I dare say – with bells on.

JOE removes both of his boots easily and places them in a corner out of the way, then returns to his chair, tips it up and brushes the mud onto the floor by **EMILY**'s feet.

EMILY: Oh yes, much better. Now it looks like I've made all the mess.

JOE: Ah, 'tis scummer! (Translation: 'Ah, it's an accident.) 'ere.

JOE grabs **EMILY**'s boot and tries to pull it off. He struggles with it, grunting and groaning. He straddles her leg with his bottom in **EMILY**'s face, trying to lever it off that way but without success. **EMILY** reacts appropriately, squealing in pain or disgust, smacking **JOE**'s bottom out of her way etc. Eventually, the boot flies off and crashes against the dresser on the other side of the stage.

EMILY: Oh, that's great. Now we've smashed her best china.

JOE waves it off as if it's of no consequence and reaches for **EMILY's** other boot.

EMILY: Oh, no you don't. I'll do this one on my own, thank you.

JOE retrieves **EMILY's** boot and places it next to his own, then moves C and starts to remove his outer clothing, a woolly hat, a coat and a thick cardigan. **EMILY's** second boot comes off easily, much to her relief, and she places it next to the others.

EMILY: (picking up **JOE's** hat from the table and putting it on her head) I think I'll have that.
Oh yes, that's better. Did you know you lose fifty per cent of your body heat through the top of your head? (Looking at **JOE's** bald head) More in your case.

JOE is now removing his cardigan and has one arm out of it.

EMILY: I think I'll have that too while I'm at it.

She puts her arm through the free arm of the cardigan, hoping to slip straight into it but **JOE** twists and turns trying to get his other arm out. **EMILY** briefly, nearly gets it on, but they pirouette once more, and **JOE** ends up wearing the cardigan again. As **JOE** starts to remove it once more, **EMILY** appears to be starting the whole process over again, but **JOE** raises his hand to stop her, removes the cardigan and courteously drapes it round her shoulders muttering incomprehensibly.

EMILY: Thank you, Joe. You can be a proper gentleman at times.

JOE: 'ee be steeved, (Translation: Thee (you) be stiff with the cold.)
(smiling shyly) 'Tis worth it to see 'ee 'appy.

MARTHA enters UL as **JOE** is gently helping **EMILY** to get both her arms into the cardigan.

SOUND FX: The wind is howling slightly less dramatically.

MARTHA watches **JOE** and **EMILY** whilst he also helps her into his coat. **MARTHA** wears only a sleeveless jerkin over a plain blouse and a tweed skirt. She is carrying her boots, which she has removed when on the doorstep. She is a healthy, ruddy-faced woman who takes no prisoners.

MARTHA: What be a-doin' here?

EMILY: Hello Martha. Your kind husband was just –

MARTHA: I can see with me own eyes what he be a-justin'. He be a-justin' of takin' advantage is what he be a-justin'. Joe Rudd get your filthy paws off that woman and find somethin' useful to do. You've not been in here more than five minutes and the place is looking like a pig-stay.

JOE scuttles off DL and returns promptly with a dustpan and brush which he uses to clean up the mud from the boots during the following exchange.

MARTHA: (to **EMILY**) And you're no better, young lady. You Land Girls are all the same - taking advantage of a man who's got no more sense than a doorpost.

EMILY: I was cold. He was just, very kindly, lending me some of his clothes to keep me warm.

MARTHA: Warm? Is it not warm enough for you already? If you worked harder, you'd soon stay warm, and you'd have less time to go chasing after other people's menfolk. Look at me. Do I look cold? Good, honest, hard work, that's what keeps you warm, young lady. Not stealing the clothes off a poor farmer's back and trying to wheedle your way -.

EMILY: That's not fair. I was up at 5 o'clock this morning, milking the cows and I've barely stopped all day. I've nearly finished mending the fence round the bottom field, even though it's lethal down there it's so boggy. (**JOE exits DL with dustpan and brush**) I've mucked out the pigs, I've shovelled shit of every variety and now I'm tired, cold, hungry and I smell like – well, if you think after all that I've got the energy or inclination to chase after a man who's twice my age then you're very much mistaken.

MARTHA grunts and bustles to light the fire, adding a log or two and lighting it during the following exchange.

EMILY: Thank you. That will help.

MARTHA grunts again as if to say she's not lighting the fire just for **EMILY's** benefit.

EMILY: By the way, I smelt that smell again when I came in here this evening.

MARTHA: (*with her back to EMILY*) What smell?

EMILY: Drains I suppose. It's horrible. If I didn't know better, I'd say it was the smell of the slurry pit. And it's so cold. It's like the air freezes in here when that smell comes in – or maybe it's the other way around.

LIGHTING FX: *glow from the fire*

MARTHA: (*getting up and turning to face EMILY*) You're blatherin' girl.

EMILY: Maybe.

She shivers and thrusts her hands deep into JOE's coat pockets in an effort to get warm and produces an envelope. MARTHA sees this and snatches it from EMILY.

MARTHA: Pick pocketing is it?! I'll be 'aving that.

MARTHA opens envelope and reads enclosed letter. She looks bewildered by what she reads.

EMILY: I hope it's not bad news.

JOE enters DL empty-handed

MARTHA: None 'o your concern. (*turns accusingly on Joe*) Joseph Rudd!

JOE: Guilty as charged. (*laughing at his perfect pronunciation for once*)

MARTHA: (*waving the letter at him*) ‘appen you’ll find this so funny. It’s from the Ministry of Agriculture. It says ‘ere we are (*reading*) “insufficiently productive” and we must “make every effort to meet, or exceed, the quotas below”.

JOE: Below what?

MARTHA: (*jabbing a finger at the letter*) Below ‘ere you lummox.

JOE: (*looking over her shoulder*) Cassin; they numbers is backzevore. (*Translation: can’t be done - back to front*)

MARTHA: They’s serious, Joe. (*turning over the letter*) There’s more. We are to expect two new Land Girls, “to assist the war effort by being more efficient and productive”.

EMILY: (*rather hurt*) Oh, does that mean...

MARTHA: Yes, you’ve not been pulling your finger out. And now we’ve got two more mouths to feed and even more work for us all. If you weren’t so -

JOE: (*mutters*) Leave ‘er be, maid!

MARTHA: How long have you ‘ad this letter, Joe Rudd?

JOE: (*shrugs*) Yesty? (*Translation: ‘Yesterday?’*)

MARTHA *inspects date stamp on envelope.*

MARTHA: Two weeks ago! ‘ee begors belief! Says ‘ere, we should be receiving a telegram when the girls are due so we can collect them from the station, at our time and expense if you please.

SOUND FX: *There is a knock at the door*

EMILY: Who can that be at this time of night?

MARTHA: (*angry, pointing at JOE*) The devil come to take ‘is own.

MARTHA *stomps off to go to the door UL*

EMILY: (*sotto to JOE*) Her temper’s fouler than ever this evening.

JOE: Not so much as you’d notice.

MARTHA *returns with two dishevelled and frozen young women, they each struggle to carry kit bags that are almost as big as they are, which they drop gratefully by the door as they come in. BOTH GIRLS are wet. BETTY PASSMORE is in muddied, stockinged feet and carries a pair of high-heeled shoes that are entirely inappropriate for the country. CONNIE GREENSLADE is in more appropriate clothes and wellington boots, but she is covered in mud from head to foot so that you can barely make out her face.*

JOE: Who be they then?

BETTY *produces a bedraggled letter from inside her coat and hands it to MARTHA, who glances at it and scowls.*

MARTHA: These be the two new Land Girls, if you please!

THE GIRLS shuffle toward the meagre fire, drawn like moths to a flame. **MARTHA** watches them with disbelief

EMILY: (*superior tone*) Do they have names?

BETTY: (*stuttering due to cold*) B-Betty, Betty P-Passmore.

EMILY: Oh dear, not another one with a speech impediment. (*looking at JOE who scratches his head*)

MARTHA: An' what about t'other one - the mousey thing - does it speak?

CONNIE shyly puts a hand to **BETTY's** ear and whispers.

BETTY: Tell them yourself!

CONNIE: (*quietly*) My name is Connie, Ma'am. (*she hesitates then curtseys*)

MARTHA thumps a fist down hard on the table making **THE TWO GIRLS** back away cowering.

MARTHA: 'ellabout! (*Translation: a general term of incredulity*) Oi'm not your blessed mother. 'appen if she'd thrashed some sense into you when you was a bairn you'd have more life in you now. (*pointing a dirty finger at them*) If either of you city dwelling nestledrafs (*Translation: sickly child/runt of litter*) think this is a holiday camp, think again! You be 'ere to work, an' work 'ard.

BETTY and **CONNIE** are cowering further back.

EMILY: (*recognizing that she needs to demonstrate some authority due to her seniority, but talking gently to alleviate some of the fear that the two girls must now be feeling*) Look at the state of you. One dragged through a hedge backwards and one looking like she's been rolling in mud. What way is this to turn up for a new job? You need a bath and some hot food inside you.

BETTY: (*to EMILY*) If you please, we've been walking for miles in the dark.

MARTHA: What do 'e mean miles?

BETTY: (*to MARTHA*) From the station. We were told there would be a lift.

MARTHA scowls at **JOE**, who just shrugs.

MARTHA: Miles the milk sops say. 'Tis barely six as the crow flies.

SOUND FX: Another knock at door exasperates **MARTHA**.

JOE: (*mutters*) Devil cum take 'er now.

JOE and **EMILY** share the private joke as **MARTHA** stomps to door, returning with **NICK CLATWORTHY**, a man with a swaggering gait, dressed in a long dark trench-coat and a trilby.

NICK: *(as he enters, handing MARTHA a telegram)* ...so I saw the telegram boy and told him I'd deliver this for him. Don't worry, it's not from the War Office. *(seeing the girls)* Oh, you have company.

MARTHA: *(warning off)* Let them be, Cuz.

NICK heads straight for the girls as **MARTHA** opens the telegram and begins to read.

NICK: *(raising his hat)* Good evening to you girls. I'm Nicholas, but you can call me Nick, not to be confused with old Nick.

NICK takes one of **BETTY**'s hands and kisses it, which makes the girl smile. **NICK** attempts to take **CONNIE** by the hand but she hides behind **BETTY**.

EMILY: You'll have to get used to Nick's ways if you want to survive around here.

MARTHA: 'ellabout! This 'ere telegram tells us when to expect the new Land Girls and 'ere they be as large as life afore us. How do we expect to win this war if people can't communicate proper.

JOE: *(muttering)* Vokes yapping won't win war. *(Translation: Folks talking won't win war)*

MARTHA: You'd do as well to keep your trap shut, Joe Rudd, 'til you find the sense to say something useful.

JOE sits at the table sullenly

EMILY: Or just anything we could all understand.

BETTY: *(to MARTHA)* If you please, Ma'am, we've not been introduced.

MARTHA: Introduced? Introduced?! You'll be wanting an invitation to the Royal Ball next. And don't call me Ma'am!

EMILY: *(quickly stepping forward to shake BETTY's hand to defuse the atmosphere again)* I'm Emily. Emily Dunne. I'm a Land Girl, just like you. Been here nearly a year now. I will be in charge of you. **(MARTHA snorts)**

BETTY: *(trying to smile politely)* Pleased to meet you, Emily. I'm sure we'll be jolly pals very soon.